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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAKSIN'S NORTHERN SUPPORT SHAKIER THAN EXPECTED

REF: CHIANG MAI 60 AND BANGKOK SEPTELS

¶1. Summary: With vote counting from Sunday's election still incomplete late Monday, native son Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party appears to have attracted a substantial number of "no" votes in northern Thailand, albeit not in the numbers seen in Bangkok and other areas. Voter turnout in Chiang Mai province is expected to total around 75%, only slightly lower than in the February 6, 2005 election. No violence and few election irregularities were reported. End summary

¶2. Northern Thailand, birthplace of Prime Minister Thaksin and a TRT stronghold in the 2005 election, turned in a surprisingly high number of "no" votes in Sunday's poll. Although vote results have been delayed by challenges to spoiled ballots, unofficial reports show that "no" votes in Tak province outnumbered votes received by TRT candidates in two out of the province's three constituencies. Other areas where "no" votes approach the level of TRT scores include constituencies with previous Democrat Party sympathies in Phitsanulok, Phichit, Phetchabun, Phrae, Kamphaeng Phet and Chiang Mai's Constituency ¶1.

¶3. The high level of "no" votes in Chiang Mai's Constituency 1 is partly due to the presence in the district of Chiang Mai University, which has been one of the few sources of dissent in this generally pro-Thaksin city. The still-unconfirmed result takes on a special flavor, however, because the candidate making the poor showing is TRT MP Pakorn Buranupakorn, widely believed to be behind the aggressive attack on the Democrat Party's attempted rally in Chiang Mai last Thursday (reftel). Both Pakorn and his brother, Chiang Mai Mayor Boonlert Buranupakorn, have denied instigating the rumble, which has provoked rage in Democrat areas and a possible backlash from voters as well as expressions of concern from Thaksin.

¶4. TRT candidates ran alone in all constituencies in eight out of the fifteen northern provinces. In the remaining provinces 11 constituencies were contested, with the winner to be determined by a simple majority.

¶5. Little direct vote-buying was reported although TRT allegedly made payments to encourage supporters to go to the polls in order to ensure the 20% vote needed by party candidates running unopposed.

¶6. The sizable number of spoiled ballots, frequently spoiled on purpose by voters scribbling their disapproval of Thaksin, has delayed vote counting as officials scrutinize each one and deal with intermittent protests from parties concerned.

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